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Edsall, Samuel Cook

Concerning the Panama congress

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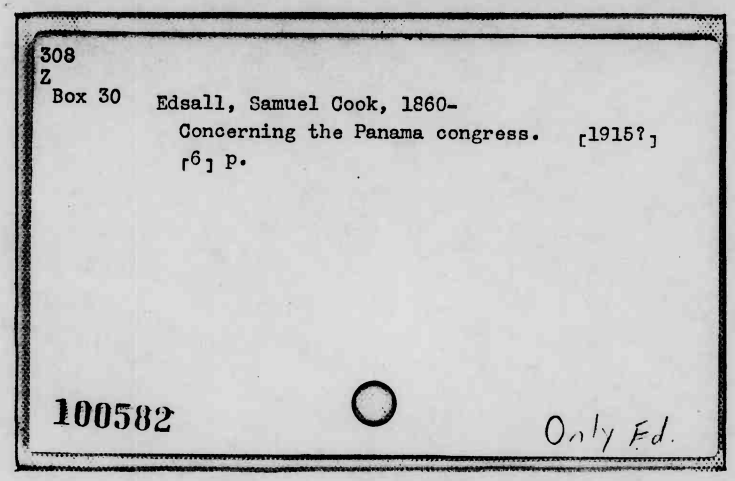

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CONCERNING THE PANAMA CONGRESS

IT will probably be remembered that the Board of Missions at its meeting in May last accepted an invitation given to it to send delegates to the Panama Congress, and that prior to its meeting in October a rumor was very generally current to the effect that then an effort would be made to get the Board to rescind that acceptance. In consequence of this rumor, a letter was addressed by several of the New York clergy to the members of the Board living in the city expressing their conviction that the decision of the Board to send representatives to the Panama Congress is wise, far-sighted and fraternal; that it is justifiable not only upon the ground of right, but also upon that of expediency; and therefore urging that the action taken in May should be sustained.

We, the undersigned, signers of the letter to which reference has been made, together with others who share the views expressed in it, are deeply grateful that the Board maintained its position by a vote which represented every section of the country and every school of thought in the Church. We recognize the existence of some misunderstanding of the action of the Board, and that there are a number of Church people who are uncertain as to the legality of its decision. We have desired to state publicly our view of the whole matter; at the same time, we have realized that an expression of our conviction might by some be considered as partisan or sectional. Fortunately, we have before us an article dealing with the question, written by the Bishop of Minnesota and appearing in the November number of his diocesan paper. We are reprinting it for our parishioners, and we hope that all who are interested will read a statement remarkable for its dispassionate spirit and judicial force. The article follows:

"The Split in the Episcopal Church"

Headings similar to the above have appeared in many of the secular newspapers of the country in connection with the action of the Board of Missions in deciding to send delegates to the Panama Conference. I am not pessimistic enough to believe that there is any real danger of a split or schism in our beloved Church; but there is grave reason to fear that there will be a great deal of bitter feeling stirred up with consequent disadvantage to the unity and efficiency of the work of our Church both at home and abroad unless heated partisans on either side shall be given grace enough to exercise some reasonable control over their tempers, tongues and pens. As I am not only a member of the Board of Missions, and of its Executive Committee, but have also been for nearly seventeen years a member of the House of Bishops, I am in a position to know that much at least of the bitterness expressed concerning the Panama Conference arises from a misunderstanding of what the House of Bishops has done, as also of what the Board of Missions has done with reference to the Panama Conference. It is quite conceivable that clergy and laity of our Church should have differing convictions as to the wisdom or expediency of sending delegates to the Panama Conference. Some within our Church feel that we are under a solemn obligation to the cause of ultimate Christian unity to maintain courteous relations with the Protestant Communions about us, and deem it desirable to participate in conferences with them concerning missionary work wherever this may be done without compromising or surrendering any of the essentials of our position as an historic branch of the Holy Catholic Church; and regard the proposed Panama Conference as an opportunity of this kind. Others in our Church, equally conscientious, believe that any possible good of sending delegates to Panama will be more than outweighed by the danger of becoming involved in entangling alliances and especially in increasing the ill-feeling toward us of the Roman Catholic Church, and possibly of some branches of the Eastern Church; and further insist that as ultimate Church unity must embrace the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Church as well as Protestant Christendom, we should beware lest in cultivating closer relations with Protestant Christianity we do not widen the breach which separates us from Rome and the East. I am not arguing this matter. I am simply trying to state the situation in a manner which does justice to the contentions of both sides.

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The statement has been widely made by those opposed to sending delegates to Panama that in doing so the Board of Missions was guilty of an act of disobedience to the House of Bishops, because the Bishops during the General Convention in New York had not concurred in a certain resolution of the House of Deputies, at the last General Convention.

The Preamble and Resolution in question was offered by the Rev. Mr. Goodwin of Western New York (not by a member of the Board of Missions, nor offered in pursuance of any action ever taken by the Board of Missions), and after having been referred to the House Committee on Missions, and amended, was finally passed by the House of Deputies in the following form:

"Whereas, this Church, through its General Convention, has repeatedly urged that the ties which bind Christian people should be strengthened, and that the Church should seek to co-operate with Christian people, not in communion with this Church, in the effort to extend the Kingdom of God in so far as such co-operation can be engaged in in loyalty to the faith and order of this Church;

"And Whereas, the Board of Missions of this Church has been invited to co-operate with other Christian Boards of Missions in matters pertaining to the way and means of extending the Kingdom of God;

"Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, that the Board of Missions is informed that in the judgment of the General Convention it has full authority to take such steps as it may deem wise to co-operate with other Christian Boards of Missions in this country and elsewhere in united efforts to arouse, organize and direct the missionary spirit and activity of Christian people to the end that the people of the Church may be enabled the better to discharge their duty to support the mission of the Church at home and abroad through prayer, work and giving. Provided, that the expense incurred in such co-operative educational efforts shall not be a charge upon the funds raised through the apportionment."

As a member of the House of Bishops familiar with the debates in that House upon this and kindred questions, I wish to state that many at least of the Bishops who voted not to concur in this resolution did so upon the ground that if it simply related to conferences and efforts like the Edin-

burgh Conference, the Laymen's Missionary Movement, the Silver Bay and Lake Geneva Conferences, etc., the resolution was unnecessary, as the Board and its officers were already holding such conferences and taking part in such movements with the entire approval of the General Convention. While, on the other hand, if the phrase in the preamble of the resolution "to co-operate with Christian people, not in communion with this Church, in the effort to extend the Kingdom of God," and the word "co-operate" in the resolution itself, meant entering into permanent relations in the actual conduct of our missionary work, it was at least open to the possibility of involving us in entangling alliances.

It will be seen therefore that the question as to whether election by the Board of Missions of delegates to Panama was in contravention of or disobedient to the action of the House of Bishops above stated, depends entirely on whether the Board of Missions in sending delegates to Panama was sending them to "co-operate" in carrying on missionary work, or simply for purposes of "conference."

Accordingly, after the controversy concerning this matter had been given wide publicity in our Church papers, I mailed to the Secretary of the Board and to the Church papers for publication a proposed resolution to the effect that in sending delegates to Panama the Board was sending them for conference only, and not in a spirit of hostility toward the Church of Rome. I mailed this resolution in advance because, owing to a change in the date of meeting, I was going to be prevented from attending the Board in person. From the published proceedings of the Board it appears that the principle of my suggestion was adopted, as the Board passed a declaration and resolution as follows:

"In sending delegates to the Panama Congress, the Board does so with the understanding that, as stated in the official bulletins of the Congress:

"1. It is to be 'along the same general lines as the Edinburgh meeting' (that is, the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910). See Bulletin No. 1.

"2. It 'is not to be a gathering for legislation on ecclesiastical questions, or even on matters of missionary policy.' See Bulletin No. 2.

"3. 'It shall be the purpose of the Panama Congress to recognize all the elements of truth and goodness in any form of religious faith.' its 'approach to the people shall be neither critical nor antagonistic, but inspired by the teaching and example of Christ and that charity which thinketh no evil and rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.' See Bulletin No. 4.

"4. All communions or organizations which 'accept Jesus Christ as Divine Saviour and Lord, and the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Revealed Word of God, and whose purpose is to make the will of Christ prevail in Latin America, are cordially invited to participate in the Panama Congress, and will be heartily welcomed.'"

On motion of Bishop Talbot, amended by Dr. Mann, it was also

"Resolved, That our delegates go for conference only and with no purpose, authority, or power of committing this Board to co-operation."

From a fair consideration of all the foregoing it seems to me to be clear beyond dispute that in sending delegates to Panama the Board of Missions did not act contrary to the direction of the General Convention nor contravene the action of the House of Bishops in declining to concur in the resolution quoted. In the mind of any fair-minded man the question was reduced simply to that of the expediency or inexpediency of sending delegates to Panama. In my own personal opinion, based on what I heard from the Bishops in charge of our work in Latin-American countries, it was not only expedient but right that we should send delegates to Panama; and I further feel that it would be invidious to assume that the men who have been chosen as our delegates—Bishop Lloyd, Bishop Cabell Brown, who spent twenty-three years in Brazil, Bishop L. L. Kinsolving of Brazil, Bishop Hulse of Cuba, Bishop Aves of Mexico, Bishop Colmore of Porto Rico, and Bishop Knight in charge of the Canal Zone—cannot be trusted to safeguard the position of our Church in any conferences they may hold with others who are carrying on work in Latin America. It should also be borne in mind that the sending of delegates to Panama does not involve the spending of a dollar raised by our parishes through their apportionments to General Missions; nor is there a proposition to expend in the future missionary funds in Latin America in any other way than that which has already met the approval of the whole Church in the wise conduct of our missions in Brazil, Cuba, Porto Rico, Mexico and the Canal Zone. Under all these conditions how can it possibly be urged

that there is any danger of "a split in the Episcopal Church"? All that is necessary is that each and every one of us should control his temper and not indulge in public speech or writing except with fair recognition of all of the existing facts. In fact, in almost, though not all, of the controversies which from time to time arise in our Church, the danger exists, not so much in radical divergence of conviction as to the principles involved, as in a mutual misunderstanding of terms, or in a failure to be absolutely fair in our statement of the viewpoint of those who differ from us.

SAMUEL COOK EDSALL.

This statement of a Western Bishop learned in the law is, in our opinion, true, just and considerate. We could not wish to have our view of the legal aspects of the action taken by the Board of Missions stated with greater clearness, courtesy or ability.

Faithfully yours,

FRANCIS A. BROWN, St. Mary's Church
FREDERICK COURTNEY, St. James's Church
WM. T. CROCKER, Church of the Epiphany
PERCY S. GRANT, Church of the Ascension
WILLIAM M. GROSVENOR, Cathedral of St. John the Divine
WILLIAM N. GUTHRIE, St. Mark's Church
HENRY LUBECK, Church of Zion and St. Timothy
HENRY MOTTET, Church of the Holy Communion
GEORGE F. NELSON, Cathedral of St. John the Divine
HARRY P. NICHOLS, Holy Trinity Church
LEIGHTON PARKS, St. Bartholomew's Church
JOHN P. PETERS, St. Michael's Church
WM. H. POTT, Archdeacon of New York
KARL REILAND, St. George's Church
HOWARD C. ROBBINS, Church of the Incarnation
NATHAN A. SEAGLE, St. Stephen's Church
THEODORE SEDGWICK, Calvary Church
HERBERT SHIPMAN, Church of the Heavenly Rest
CHARLES L. SLATTERY, Grace Church
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ERNEST M. STIRES, St. Thomas's Church
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JOHN A. WADE, Church of St. John the Evangelist

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